



Senator

Val Stevens

SPRING 2004

39th LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



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& Corrections, chair
Government Operations &
Elections, vice chair
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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Thank you for giving me the honor of representing you in Olympia. As chair of the Senate Children and Family Services and Corrections Committee, I worked on several bills that affect state services for families. Many great things were accomplished—not everything I wanted done, but I'll continue to help families by working on important, future legislation.

In this newsletter, I've outlined the major aspects that happened in the Legislature this year. They included updating sex offender laws, revising the blanket primary and working to ensure a better government.

More than anything, we want to create solid programs that will help you. After all, the citizens of Washington are the reason we come to Olympia each year. We know you are concerned about jobs, the economy, health care, your children's education and the future of your families. As an elected official, I want to make sure these concerns are addressed and that your best interest is served. We're working hard in the Senate to help boost the economy and attract new businesses to our state. In addition, I'm doing my best to do no harm and to do the right thing.

As your senator, I represent you and want to hear your comments and suggestions. Feel free to contact my office in Olympia via the toll-free legislative hotline at (800) 562-6000.

Sincerely,

Val Stevens
39th District Senator

Sex predator Web site allows parents to track potential threats

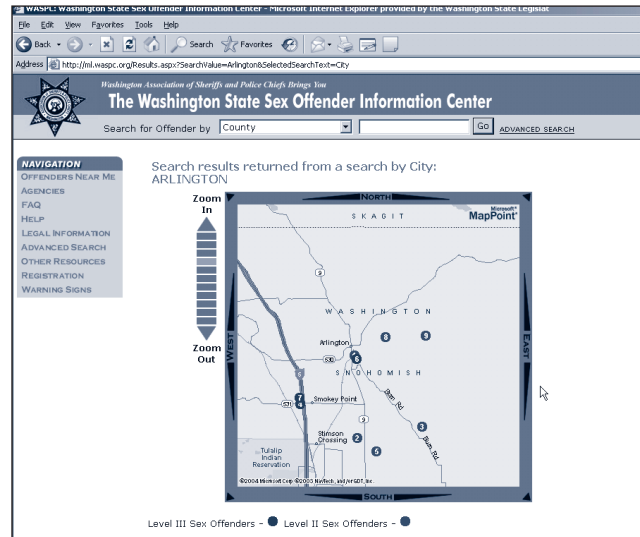
The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) recently announced the availability of a new statewide sex offender Internet database intended to help the public better identify the location of the State's most serious sex offenders. The Legislature helped provide the money to put the database on the Internet. The Web site is found at <http://ml.waspc.org>

Families can now determine if a sex offender is living in their neighborhood. While the database does not provide the exact address of a sex offender, it does alert residents to the number of sex offenders in a particular area and the seriousness of their past offenses.

"We anticipate the Web site will be used by tens of thousands of concerned Washingtonians on a daily basis," said Dave Reichert, King County Sheriff, WASPC Executive Board Member and President of the Washington State Sheriffs Association.

In 2002, the Washington State Legislature passed a law authorizing the development of statewide Internet database to be built by WASPC.

The database is designed to list all level II and level III offenders considered the most dangerous and likely to commit repeat offenses. Users of the database can search the site by address or name. By entering an address, all



Arlington, Washington

The Web site is found at
<http://ml.waspc.org>

level II and III sex offenders living in the area will appear on the computer screen. Users will see the offender's photograph, address by 100 block and other relevant information about the offender.

Sex offenders receive life sentence

Once again, my committee looked at the sex offender issue and how we could continue to protect families and children. One of the bills, House Bill 2400, came to my committee, and we made several changes to it—changes for the better. To my dismay, the governor vetoed the section of the bill that reemphasized the Legislature's intent that all serious sex offenders receive a life sentence. Despite the governor's veto, current law still requires a life sentence for all serious sex offenders.

Next year, we will be revisiting this issue to ensure that our children and families are truly protected. Fortunately, not all was lost in the veto. The bill narrowed and tightened some of our sex offender laws to prevent dangerous sex offenders from entering alternative treatment programs.

Because of the increasing number of sex offenders, the bill also asks the Washington Institute for Public Policy and the Sentencing Guidelines Commission to study two issues for the Legislature.

The Institute must analyze and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of current sex offender policies, including the Special Sex Offender Sentencing Alternatives (SSOSA), the programs at the Department of Corrections and the risk assessment tool used by the End of Sentence Review Committee. We need to know if we can make any changes to increase public safety.

The Commission will examine the SSOSA program, including eligibility, terms of incarceration, appropriate conditions and restrictions, and standards for removing a sex offender out of SSOSA. Both reports with recommendations must be given to the Legislature by Dec. 31, 2004.

Future elections to be impacted

Because the Supreme Court ruled that Washington's blanket primary system was unconstitutional, the Legislature replaced it with a new system called the Top Two. During the debate, two ideas surfaced to the top.

Top Two

The Top Two alternative is often described by several newspapers as the Louisiana primary. This name is somewhat inaccurate since the state would not adopt the Louisiana system; however, they are close in one respect. The Top Two alternative would allow the top two candidates in the primary, regardless of party affiliation to advance to the general election. Washington currently uses this system for more than 5,000 nonpartisan offices.

It is possible that two Republicans or two Democrats would move to the general election. But after reviewing election results for the last 10 years, these types of incidents would rarely happen. It has been difficult for me to vote on changing the system we've all become accustomed to using.

In meetings Legislators had across the state along with surveys and polls, we learned that Washington voters preferred the Top Two system. In fact, 75 percent of Washington voters do not want to be limited to voting for candidates of only one political party. They want to vote for the person, not the party. As for the Top Two system, 56 percent of voters preferred it.

The governor vetoed a portion of the Top Two bill, giving us a system used in Montana. The system is slightly different from the Modified Montana system.

Modified Montana

The Modified Montana is a mixture of both Arizona and Montana's primary election system. This process requires the voter to choose a political party at the time of voting. A registered voter would have the option to receive three ballots—one for the Republicans, one for the Democrats and one for the minor parties. The voter would have to choose one ballot and make his/her selection from that ballot only. The other two ballots are destroyed. It's called a private choice primary because nobody keeps a record of which ballot the voter selected.

In the polls, only 30 percent of voters preferred the Montana-style primary. Both the Senate and the House could not garner enough votes to pass the Modified Montana system.

The birth of Washington's blanket primary

From 1890 to 1934 Washington's elections system went through several changes as the citizens determined the best method to elect a person into office. Then in 1934, the Washington State Grange together with the state AFL-CIO and other allies proposed an initiative to the Legislature to change the system into a blanket primary. It was adopted and was the system used until this year.

Basically, the blanket primary allows voters to choose whomever they want, regardless of political party. In other words, a person could vote for a Republican Governor, a Democrat Lt. Governor and a Libertarian Attorney General.

Most other states do not provide this option. In fact, Washington is the only state to have had a blanket primary, until recently when California tried to adopt the system. If a person lived in a different state, the voter probably received a Republican or Democrat ballot,

and the voter could only choose one ballot—either all Republicans or all Democrats. It's no surprise that most Washingtonians prefer the blanket primary system. It gives the voter more choices.

When the initiative was adopted, the major political parties immediately challenged it in court. The State Supreme Court upheld the blanket primary in 1936. Forty years later, the political parties challenged the blanket primary again and failed.

California tried to adopt a similar blanket primary, based on Washington's system, in 1996. It was challenged, and the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the parties that the blanket primary removed some of the political parties' constitutional rights. Here in Washington, the major political parties took the blanket primary to court for the third time, and this time they won.

Sen. Val Stevens' Sponsored Legislation Signed Into Law

Saving Families

ESSB 6642—Helping parents get their kids back: Gives parents a tool to find out from DSHS what they have to do to have their children returned to them after being taken away by Child Protective Services

SB 6643—Protecting family relationships: Protects parental rights to visit and interact with their children from courts who would take them away

SSB 6171—Protecting students from teachers and coaches who prey on them: Improves safety measures to keep teachers from sexually attacking students

Improving Government

ESB 5083—Receiving reciprocity for concealed pistol license: Allows visitors to Washington to use their state's concealed pistol license as

long as the license meets Washington's strict regulations

E2SSB 5216—Evaluating mental health: Gives rural areas flexibility in court cases when trying to determine mental competency

SSB 6115—Giving a tax exemption for high school sports: Protects high school and nonprofit youth teams from being taxed to use golf courses and other recreational services.

Helping Businesses

SSB 6600—Providing liability relief for contractors: Enacts a six-year statute of limitation for claims against contractors.

SSB 6601—Preventing people from filing obesity lawsuits: Prevents liability lawsuits against restaurants for obesity or weight gain.

2ESSB 5536—Clarifying warranty claims on condominiums: Protects owners and builders by clarifying warranties and who is responsible for repairs



Sen. Val Stevens saying goodbye to Sen. Dino Rossi on the Senate floor: Sen. Rossi had just announced his resignation from the Senate to move into other political arenas.

Town Halls

Sen. Stevens will be holding town halls on the following subjects and dates:

Issues affecting the Arlington area

Monday, May 17, 2004
7 - 8:30 p.m.
Conference Room,
Crown Distributing
17117 59th Ave NE
Arlington, Washington

Issues affecting small businesses

Monday, May 17, 2004
Noon - 1:30 p.m., no host luncheon
Joy's Bakery & Café
823 Metcalf Street
Sedro-Woolley, Washington

and

Monday, May 24, 2004
Noon - 1:30 p.m., no host luncheon
Alfy's Pizza
19121 State Route 2
Monroe, Washington